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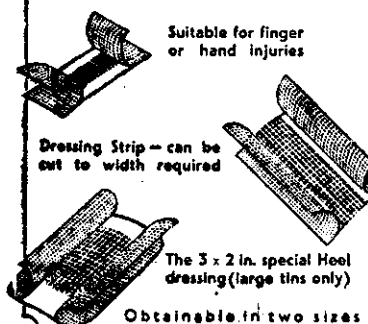


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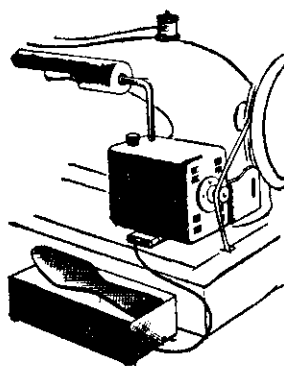
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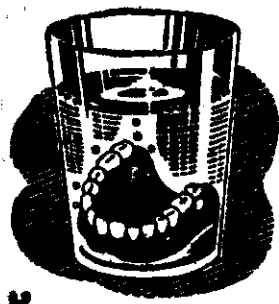
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The Orchestra on the Coast

(continued from page 6)

Malcolm, aged about seven, nine and four, who wanted to know about this unusual activity.

"What is it, mister? Is there going to be a show?"

"Yes, a musical show. Lots of people playing on instruments. Violins and trumpets and trombones and drums."

"Any cowboys?" Malcolm asked.

"No cowboys and nobody singing. Just people playing."

"No Mickey Mouse?"

"Afraid not. Mickey Mouse is only on the pictures."

The other two knew that and laughed at Malcolm who was ashamed and baffled. Action was obviously needed if these three Coasters were to be won for music. A viola appeared at the stage door.

"Excuse me," I said. "We don't quite know what to expect—could you help us please?"

She played pizzicato for them, and let them pluck a little and handle the bow. They gasped with pleasure and danced and darted about the instrument, stroking the warmly coloured wood. The viola player looked happy too. It seemed a good start.

Before rehearsals I learnt; during rehearsals and concerts I looked and listened and learnt. I learnt about timpani, the deep, hide-covered copper basins, which I had vaguely identified before as "something like a tom tom." I learnt that they must be tuned constantly, and that sometimes they have to be tuned to one key while the orchestra is playing in another. During the delicate tuning operations the timpanist must at the same time keep counting the bars played so that he will know when to come in again for his next passage.

I learnt that a piccolo can go out of tune in a matter of seconds through slight changes in air temperature, leaving the player frustrated and the music critic sharpening the cutting edge of his pencil.

And I learnt that if a violin told me double bass playing was superior only to coffin making, I should take his word no more or less than the word of a double bass if he told me violinists were immoral, unChristian and a menace to society.

MUSIC IS MOVEMENT

AT concerts music comes from behind the footlights. If it's good, it's alive, but formal. At rehearsals, viewed from the electricians' platform, music is movement and people: movement in concentric half circles, strings, wood-wind, brass and percussion, spreading out from the conductor like ripples on a pond. The movement is the music and the people: violin and viola bows moving in and out, up and down, separate flashes of lightning. Cello and bass bows moving across and across caressingly, musicians moving with their instruments. Flautists waiting for their cue, eyes on the score, moving mouth and jaw muscles, getting the feel right for blowing. The first flute moving before he comes in, coming in on movement, blowing with all of him, fingers, elbows, shoulders, eyebrows and torso.

Little things: the agile fingers of the strings' left hands, alive on their own,

all the violins turning a page together, a violinist sneezing quietly, bending forward and back exactly on the beat, the first trumpet waiting to come in, partly extinguished under a red eye shade, lower profile immobile, jaw forward, making an embouchure, the shock when the loud speaker gear blasted unexpectedly in the middle of a soft passage, making us all jump and glare, struck on a sensitive spot.

BOXING WAS POSTPONED

OF the sounds I'm not qualified to write. I can only say they moved me deeply, and I think they moved Coast people, although that was more difficult to sense. At Greymouth, where they played first, the Orchestra's pre-concert diffidence was dispersed by the hospitable action of the Greymouth Boxing Association, who announced publicly that they were postponing a Monday night meeting because of the visit of the Orchestra. But we felt there might be something sinister in the story brought back from one of the Greymouth pubs.

Two Orchestra members were having a quiet drink, talking of the night's programme and comparing a symphony in D Minor with one, say, in G Minor. "You're on the Coast now," said a voice behind them, "Play the one in Coal Miner."

At the evening concerts I saw only two people who were at all like what strangers think of as Coast types. One was an old man with a bugle nose and white hair who kept his hat on until The King. He made no move during the concert except to clap in a measured fashion, and his face wore exactly the same expression when he went out as it had when he came in. For all I know he may possess a vast knowledge of music.

The other might have been a mechanic or an engine driver on a timber mill. He came in on the hour, giving way for nobody: fat, sallow and hostile, he pounded belligerently down the aisle, hat on his head, open lumber jacket swinging. Like most of the concert-goers he looked happier and a bit surprised when he left. I suppose they had screwed themselves up for an ordeal. Classical music was something you turned off hurriedly when it was announced on the radio. It was a language you didn't speak, full of foreign words like *opus* and *allegro vivace*. Well, it didn't come to your doorstep very often, better grit your teeth and face the unfamiliar. But when you heard it, it wasn't unfamiliar, it was simply something that is in all of us if we give it a chance to come out. The National Orchestra, who have a lot in them, coax it out of us too, whether we are West Coasters or North Aucklanders, or M.P.'s with an election on our minds, and best of all, they coax it out of the children, whose faces are worth watching as they come out of school concerts.

Something must be added, of course, to instructive familiarity with music. On the Coast, Adult Education and the Arts Council are doing that job. They are modest and say they have only just started. "But," an official told us. "Something is stirring. We can feel that." If the National Orchestra stimulated that stirring, I think the members will be well content.

—G. leF. Y.